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Another spy motive: getting back at Uncle Sam

By Warren Richey
Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

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The Walker spy case raises troubling questions about why Americans betray their country.

Recent allegations that US Army Lt. Col. Wayne G. Gillespie took part in a plot to steal and sell United States arms to Iran suggest the primary motive of such individuals is to make money.

But experts who have studied the problem often find deeper motives: divided loyalties, frustration with bureaucracy, or even simple anger at superiors.

"I think disgruntlement may be a far more serious problem than anyone realizes," says William V. Kennedy, co-author of the 1983 book "The Intelligence War" and a former intelligence officer with the Strategic Air Command.

"There is a serious undercurrent of disgruntlement in the whole federal bureaucracy that could be fertile ground for [espionage recruitment]. The KGB has already recognized it, and our bureaucracy hasn't," Mr. Kennedy says.

If the government has a specific policy or plan regarding disgruntled workers or cynical bureaucrats, it is not being publicized. Spokesmen for the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Department, the National Security Agency, and the Office of Personnel Management all declined official comment on the subject. "It is a non-issue," a Navy spokesman said.

Others don't see it that way.

"The 1960s has produced a greater sense of alienation from American values, and I think there is a whole generation of Americans now in their 40s that was affected by these currents," says Guenter Lewy of the University of Massachusetts, who studied US personnel security while at the American Enterprise Institute in 1983.

There have been several recent examples of espionage or breach of trust on the part of Americans in sensitive positions.

On March 6, a 22-year-old seaman aboard the US aircraft carrier Nimitz sat down and wrote a letter home to his father in Norfolk, Va.

It began: "Enclosed is a copy of my latest evaluation, not bad is it. That is just a little proof of my performance as a sailor. If they only knew how much I hate this carrier. Also enclosed is a copy of the letter the operations officer sent to Rachel [the seaman's wife] designating me Sailor of the Month. Do you belive that?"

Two months later, that sailor of the month — Michael Lance Walker — was escorted off the Nimitz in irons, to stand trial with his father on charges of spying for the Soviet Union.

On Aug. 13, 1984, an analyst at the Naval Intelligence Support Center in Maryland wrote a letter to the London editor of an authoritative military encyclopedia, Jane's Fighting Ships. The analyst, who was quietly moonlighting as a $5,000-a-year contributor to Jane's, wrote: "I hope that you ... know that my loyalty to Jane's is above question. I'd rather quit here than there."

Last October, the Navy analyst — Samuel L. Morison — was arrested and charged with selling classified US intelligence photographs to Jane's.

How is it that a member of the US Navy could apparently hold a higher loyalty to a British naval encyclopedia than to the US government?

These and similar cases have intelligence experts analyzing the question: What makes a man spy against his country?

In the 1950s and '60s, it was widely held that any American who spied against the US for the Soviet Union did so because he was a communist or for other ideological reasons. To such a person, money would have been an insult, close observers say.

Today, many officials say Americans engaged in espionage spy mostly for money. Other experts agree that money plays an important role in most known espionage cases but suggest that a spy's initial motives in undertaking a disloyal act may be far more complex than simple greed or ideology.

In the Walker case, officials have suggested that Michael's father, John A. Walker Jr., became a Soviet spy to fulfill a James Bond fantasy and to achieve a sense of excitement.

Some officials have speculated that Michael may have spied because he had a deeper sense of loyalty to his father than to his government or his country.

In a 1981 case, 2nd Lt. Christopher M. Cooke, a launch officer at a US Air Force nuclear-missile silo, said in his confession that he gave classified documents to the Soviets to persuade them to use him as a "medium for the promulgation of a policy shift ... which would provide me with a first-rate piece of publishable material." Cooke's motives are believed to have been more an attempt to gain a reputation as a Soviet scholar than a desire to earn money from such publication.

On at least two occasions, Americans are believed to have become spies because they were disgruntled with their employer — the US government.

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The most recent case involved William Kampiles, an embittered former employee of the CIA who sold a top-secret spy-satellite manual to the Soviets for $3,000 in the late 1970s. Kampiles was said to have been upset that he had not been promoted to a specific job at the CIA.

Some experts see a growing cynicism, anger, and frustration among government civilian workers and the military.

It is said to stem in part from the chronic overclassification of government documents that don't really constitute secrets.

It also stems from the selective "leaking" of real secrets by high-level policymakers intent on achieving a calculated political gain.

Dr. Steve Pieczenik, a Washington-area psychiatrist and a former senior official at the State Department, says such selective leaking constitutes "political hypocrisy" which in turn breeds widespread cynicism among bureaucrats.

"If they see senior bureaucrats leaking all the time for their own political advantage, why shouldn't [lower-level bureaucrats] be doing it for their own remuneration?"

Dr. Pieczenik adds, "We have a double standard which has to stop very quickly."

While cynicism alone hasn't driven many government employees to spy, it may, according to some specialists, contribute to an erosion of loyalty to the US by those in government service.

Many journalists employ the technique of seeking out disgruntled workers to gain access to sensitive information for stories. Such leaks have been denounced by the Reagan administration.

At one point last year, administration officials proposed the expanded use of polygraph tests and the signing of lifelong pre-publication censorship agreements as a means of combating leaks to the press.

Professor Lewy says that young Americans who grew up during the 1960s were "radicalized" and have come to view the US government with suspicion and distrust. He calls this the "Boyce syndrome," named for Christopher Boyce, who in 1976 at age 22, sold classified CIA documents to the Soviets in an effort to strike back at what he viewed as a corrupt US intelligence organization.

In his 1983 report, Lewy writes: "Anyone who has had contact . . . with the generation that matured in the 1960s knows that Boyce's deep sense of alienation from American society is not an unusual occurrence in this group."

He adds, "This country today has many thousands of 'Boyces' and consequently a large number of potential spies."

Lewy contends there has been an overemphasis on spying for money.

"It is true that most of the spies who have been caught did it for money, but what we don't know is how many are out there who have not been caught who were spying for different reasons. The machinery is not in place to catch spies who do it for other reasons."